



# Hey, You Wanna Play Ultimate?

**Ultimate:** A fast-paced team sport, played with a disc. A sport that has traditionally relied upon a code of sportsmanship which places the responsibility for fair play on the players themselves. There are no referees. This is the Spirit of the Game.

## Basics of the Game

### **Game Play:**

- Seven players on the field per team; substitutions are made only after a point is scored.
- Each point begins with a “pull” (like a kick-off in football), each team lining up on its respective goal line.
- The disc is thrown from player to player, progressing down the field towards the endzone.
- After catching the disc, you must stop and establish a pivot foot, taking as few steps as possible.
- You have TEN seconds to throw the disc. The defense is responsible for counting to ten. If no defender is guarding you and counting (out loud), you may take as long as you like to throw.
- You may throw the disc in any direction, and in any manner you like, as long as your pivot foot maintains contact with a stationary spot on the ground.
- A turnover occurs if the ten-count is reached or if you throw the disc and it is not caught by your team.
- A point is scored when your team makes a throw that is caught in the endzone.
- Games are generally played to a certain number of points (11, 13, 15, or 17 being common).

### **Out of Bounds and Turnovers:**

- If the disc is caught by the defending team or if it falls to the ground, it is a turnover. The disc is played from the spot of the catch or where the disc came to rest on the ground.
- If the disc is caught out of bounds, or falls to the ground out of bounds, it is a turnover. The disc is played from the spot on the sideline where it went out.
- If a player catches the disc but drops it, it is a turnover.
- If the disc goes out of bounds in the endzone, or if it is turned-over in the endzone, the disc is played from the nearest point on the goal line.
- The first point of contact with the ground is used to determine if a player is in or out of bounds. This contact can be made by a foot, an elbow, a knee, whatever. If momentum then carries the player out of bounds, the disc is played by that player at the point on the sideline where they went out. The player with the best perspective, usually the player who catches the disc, makes the in- or out-of-bounds call.

### **Contact and Fouls:**

- Ultimate is a non-contact sport. Any bodily contact other than incidental contact is a foul.
- A player who is fouled is responsible for calling it by shouting “FOUL!”
- When a foul occurs, all players must freeze where they are on the field.
- Contact between a defending player and a player throwing the disc is considered a foul.
- Setting a “pick” (like in basketball) is not allowed and is considered a foul.
- When making a catch, contact between players going for the disc is a foul (similar to pass-interference rules in football). The disc is given to the player who would have made the catch if there had been no contact.
- Any foul may be “contested.” On a contested foul, the disc goes back to the player who threw it.
- After a foul, play resumes by the defense calling “disc in.” This is a “check.”

### **Spirit of the Game:**

- Ultimate has always relied on a spirit of sportsmanship which places the responsibility for fair play on the players themselves. Highly competitive play is encouraged, but never at the expense of the bond of mutual respect between players or the basic joy of play.
- In the case where a player commits a violation out of sincere ignorance of the rules, it is common practice to stop play and explain the violation.



## The Ultimate Lexicon – A list of some commonly used Ultimate terms.

- check / checking the disc* – After any stoppage of play, the defense starts play by calling “disc in.”
- clear / clearing* – Getting out of the way of other teammates’ cuts to the disc.
- clogging* – When too many players are in the same part of the field.
- contesting a foul* – The player called for a foul is allowed to contest the call if they believe that no foul occurred.
- cup* – When playing a defensive zone, the cup is the group of players closest to the person with the disc.
- cut / cutting* – The basic element of any offense. Each teammate makes cuts to unoccupied areas of the field in attempts to get open for a pass.
- dump* – A short backwards pass to a handler or other player on your team.
- flow* – When the offense is effectively moving the disc down the field, making good cuts and quick passes.
- force* – A defensive stance used when you are guarding someone with the disc. When forcing, you are trying to make them to throw to a certain area of the field. If you *force line*, you attempt to make them throw down the sideline of the field; if you *force middle*, you attempt to make them throw towards the middle part of the field.
- foul* – An infraction during play, usually caused by excessive contact between opposing players. A player that is fouled should call it by shouting “FOUL!” Play resumes after a foul with a “check.”
- hammer* – An over-head throw made with the disc upside-down. Also called a “U.D.”
- handler* – A position when playing offense. Three players are designated handlers, responsible for the majority of the passes that will take place as the disc is moved from side to side across the field.
- huck* – A long throw downfield, often to a player in the endzone, often made in desperation.
- long* – A position when playing offense. Two players are designated longs, responsible for getting as far downfield as they can. Longs catch many of a team’s goals.
- marker* – The defender that is guarding the player with the disc.
- mid / middle* – A position when playing offense. Two players are designated mids. They play the field between the longs and the handlers and make many of the catches that lead to forward progress down the field.
- pick* – A pick is one form of a foul. When playing defense, if the person you are covering runs past another player in such a way that you either bump into that player or are forced out of position, you have been picked. Picks are illegal in Ultimate and should be called by shouting “PICK!” Play resumes after a pick with a “check.”
- pivot foot* – Once a player catches the disc they must establish a pivot foot in as few steps as possible. The pivot foot for right-handed throwers is their left foot, for left-handed throwers it is their right foot.
- pull* – The throw used to start each point. The team that just scored throws to the opposing team. Both teams must be lined up on their goal lines before the pull.
- SOTG / spirit of the game* – The single most important aspect of Ultimate. It is a respect of the game and its players that overrides the common “win at all costs” attitude of most organized sports.
- stack* – A common offensive strategy. The stack consists of a single-file line of players, usually down the center of the field, each player five to ten yards from the player in front of them. A handler will have the disc, the two other handlers will be the first two in line, followed by the two mids, and then the two longs. Players take turns making cuts, usually handlers first, then mids, then longs. On an ideal stack play, the player with the disc will throw to a handler, who will throw to a mid, who will throw to a long. The long then throws back to a handler and the stack starts again.
- stall* – A turnover that occurs if the marker completes a ten count on the player with the disc.
- stall count* – Once a player has established a pivot foot, the defender marking them begins an audible count to ten by saying, “stalling one... stalling two...” If ten is reached before the throw, it is a turnover.
- straight up* – A defensive marking position. The defender marking the player with the disc attempts to block any and all passes that the thrower makes, in particular those passes directed down the field.
- strip* – When the disc is knocked out of a player’s hand by a defender, it has been stripped. A strip is not a turnover. The disc is returned to the player who was stripped.
- strong side* – The side of the field that the disc is on.
- swing / swing pass* – A lateral pass to a handler or mid. Swing passes provide some progress down the field, but their strength is moving the disc (and the defense) back and forth, clearing areas for mids and longs to cut into.
- travel* – When a the player with the disc moves their pivot foot, or takes unnecessary steps before setting a pivot foot, this is a travel. Any player that sees a travel should call it by shouting “TRAVEL!” A travel call is not a turnover, but play is stopped and started again with a “check.”
- two-finger* – a forehand throw.
- up call* – The player marking the thrower is responsible for letting their team know when the disc is in the air, usually accomplished by shouting “UP!” as it is thrown.
- weak side* – The side of the field that the disc is *not* on.
- Z / zontal / H.Z.* – Diving horizontal for the disc. The pinnacle of all catches is going Z in the endzone for a game-winning point.



## **Getting a Grip on Things...**

There are two absolutely essential activities in Ultimate: throwing and catching. This might seem simplistic to some players, but the importance of good throwing and catching skills cannot be over-emphasized, particularly for the beginning player.

### **Catching the Disc**

The most important skill of all is catching. If you can't catch, you can't score. Simple as that. If your throws aren't up to par yet, you can still be of value to your team by making catches and short easy passes back to a handler or mid. But if you drop everything tossed at you, you will never get the disc to throw it.

The critical parts of a good catch:

- Use two hands. Get one hand above the disc and one hand below it. This is often called pancaking the disc. Never *ever* catch the disc with only one hand unless you are forced to.
- Watch the disc all the way into your hands. Keep your eyes on it until you have it secured. Don't look downfield to see who's open, watch the disc all the way in.
- Go to the disc. Cut to the disc as hard as you can. Once you know a pass is directed at you, don't let up – keep moving towards the disc as fast as you can. If you don't, there will no doubt be someone on defense willing to beat you to it.



### **Throwing the Disc**

The most insecure part of a new player's game is their throw. Once they have the disc they panic, tossing it quickly away on impulse. The cure for this is practice, practice, practice. Start with a proper grip, get a partner, and get out there and throw. Start with short throws, and work up. And don't forget to practice the throws you are least comfortable with – by mastering them you will boost your confidence and your play will improve dramatically.

#### **The Backhand Grip**



This basic backhand grip uses the index finger along the rim of the disc for a high degree of control and direction. The thumb and heel of the thumb are pressed tightly to the top of the disc. As it is released, the disc rolls off the index finger, creating the spin you need for control and stability. (A variation of this grip is to straighten your middle finger under the disc to help keep it stable in your hand.)



This version of the backhand grip uses all four fingers tight under the rim for extreme power. The thumb and heel of the thumb grip the top of the disc firmly as well. This is the grip popular among experience players and the one used by almost all long throwers. The rim of the disc is ripped off the index finger creating a high spin rate. (Some players don't use their pinky with this grip, which makes it less clunky and easier to switch from backhand to forehand grips.)

#### **The Forehand Grip**



This grip uses the index finger under the disc to support it, and the middle finger on the inside of the rim. The disc flicks off the end of the middle finger. The key to making a good forehand throw is stepping into it. Right-handers should set their left foot as their pivot foot, step two or three feet to the right with their right leg, bend their right knee, and throw the disc with their arm fully extended. You want as much spin on the disc as you can get to keep it stable (and angling the disc down, away from your body, will help beginners gain control of this throw).

The hammer (or U.D.) is made with this same grip, but the disc is thrown overhead, almost like throwing a football. Keep the top of the disc facing your head and give it as much spin as you can. The trick to throwing a good hammer pass is knowing how the disc falls at the end of its flight, so watch it closely as you practice.

### **Tips on Throwing**

- A disc flies by a combination of spin and air speed. The more spin you put on the disc, the more stable it will be.
- Throw the disc low and with lots of spin when playing in high wind or the disc will be lifted up and blown away.
- Keep all your throws short to medium length, no matter the conditions. Don't just huck it and hope for the best.
- Practice patience. Once you get the disc, take your time, and make the first pass you are certain of completing.
- Anticipate and lead your player. Throw the disc where they will be, not where they are.
- Use fakes. Fake a throw you can't make – the person marking won't know and it can move them out of position. If you see your player cutting to one side, make a quick fake to the opposite side then come right back to make the pass.
- Extend yourself. Step as far in each direction as you can, stretching out from your pivot foot. You can get a total of ten to fifteen feet of extension if you try. This will force the marker to move, freeing up space for you to throw.



## **Basic Defense**

### **Guarding the Thrower**

If the player you are guarding has the disc, it is your job to make it as difficult as possible for them to throw it. Your first responsibility is to start a stall count. Get as close to them as you can (you cannot be closer than the diameter of the disc) and say loudly, “stalling one... stalling two...” Your count should be in seconds. If you reach ten, it is a turnover. Spread your arms wide and challenge the thrower on each and every pass they attempt. Use your hands, use your legs. Move around and get in the way as much as you can, and don't forget to keep counting. If they do manage to get a throw off, immediately shout “UP!” to let your

teammates downfield know that the disc is on the way. Up calls, even on short passes, let your team know what is happening with the disc. This communication is critical in many situations as your defense will be too busy guarding the receivers to watch what the thrower is doing.

### **Marking Straight-Up**

The basic form of marking is called “straight-up.” You are attempting to stop any direct forward progress of the disc. The thrower might get off a dump pass or a swing pass, but that's fine; your job is to keep them from getting the disc past you down the field. You can get aggressive and attempt to stop *all* passes the thrower tries, but beware of fakes or you can find yourself completely out of position, unable to effect the throw at all.



### **Forcing**

There are several options when marking the thrower. Sometimes you may want the player with the disc to throw it in a particular direction, like into the wind, making their passes less reliable. Sometimes you want the thrower to pass into a particular area of the field, to where your defense is waiting. To do this you “force” the thrower.



When forcing the thrower, your goal is to make them pass the disc only into the part of the field that you choose. By allowing them to throw only to that part of the field, you take the rest of their passes away, making it easier for your defense to cover the players downfield.

Usually a force is decided ahead of time, often between points. If you are marking, shout out to your team which

way you are forcing. It is essential that your defense knows what the force will be, allowing them to guard the receivers accordingly.

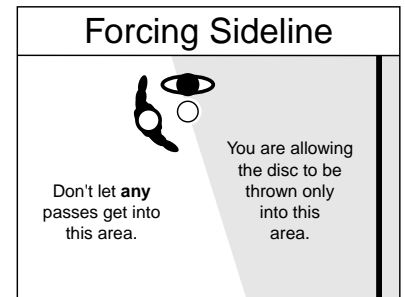


The two common forces are *forcing sideline*, and *forcing middle*.

### **Forcing Sideline:**

When forcing sideline you are limiting the thrower's options by only allowing them passes down the edge of the field. This creates a much smaller area for players to cut into, giving the defense a greater opportunity to block the pass. Your job as marker is to make absolutely certain that no throws are made to the middle part of the field. Let the thrower make an easy toss down the line, but don't let them have anything else. You *must* overplay the middle of the field and let your defense worry about sideline throws.

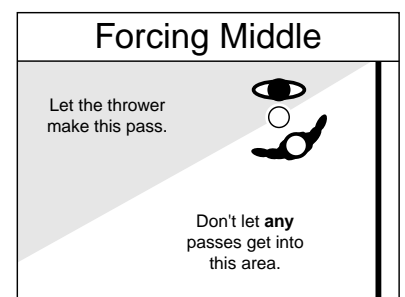
This force obviously works best when the disc is near or on the sideline.



### **Forcing Middle:**

When you force middle you are limiting the thrower's ability to progress the disc down the field. You must make absolutely certain that no throws get past you down the line. Don't fall for fakes – let them make a swing pass to the middle, just don't let them burn you down the line. In general, the middle of the field is more congested than the sidelines, and your defense will count on you to stop sideline throws so they can exploit the clogging that will occur in the middle of the field.

This force works good against teams that rely on sideline passes, or against teams that have trouble with clogging.

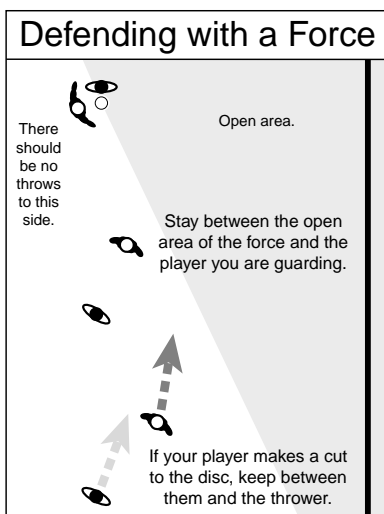


## Guarding the Receiver

Most of the defense in Ultimate is played person-to-person, often called “player across.” As the teams ready for the pull, players from the team throwing the disc line up opposite from the player on the other team that they will guard on defense. Once the disc is pulled, each player runs downfield to meet up with the player they will guard.

As the defender, it is your job to stay as close to the person you are covering as possible, and attempt to block any passes thrown to them. This requires a certain amount of anticipation. Try and guess what the player will do next, but don't get caught off-guard. Pay attention to where the disc is at, but stay on your player. Listen for “up” calls to know when the disc is in the air.

Where you want to place yourself relative to the receiver depends on the position that they are playing, and where the disc is on the field. In general, if you are guarding a handler or a mid you will want to keep between them and the thrower to stop any short passes, and if you are guarding a long you will want to keep between them and the endzone to guard against long throws for scores. Your positioning also depends on where other players are (both offense and defense). Pay attention to the action around you, not just the player you are guarding. Good positioning comes with experience, so remember what you've done that was affective as well as what didn't seem to work. And be sure to watch other players' positioning when you are on the sidelines – this is the fastest way to learn.



### Defending with a Force

If the marker is forcing the thrower in any way, your positioning on defense can change a bit. A throw shouldn't come through the force (through the area the marker is blocking off) so you can move off your player more than usual, protecting the area that the marker is leaving open. If your player starts to cut into this open area, keep between them and the thrower, and keep your arms out to block any passes you might not see. Listen for “up” calls – if your back is to the thrower you'll need all the help you can get to know where the disc is.

(In the illustration, the marker is forcing sideline, but the positioning is similar if forcing middle.)

## Basic Offense

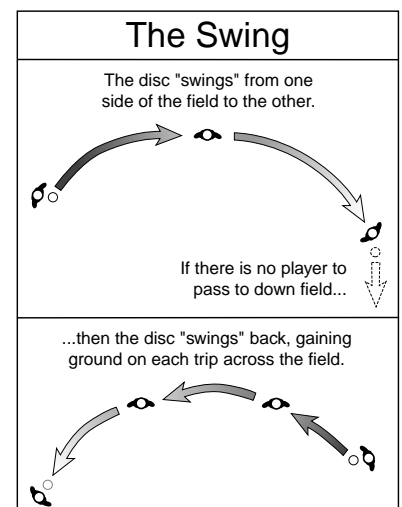
### The Swing

The basic offensive structure in Ultimate is called the “swing” – the lateral movement of the disc from one player to another across the field. A single swing play gains only limited forward progress, but several successive swings can gain significant progress towards the endzone.

### Mechanics of the Swing

The main objective of the offense is to move the disc down the field and into the endzone. Unfortunately, the defense is trying their best to prevent this. Because the defense is keeping forward progress of the disc at a minimum, the majority of the passes in Ultimate are made laterally, back and forth across the field.

When a receiver gains possession of the disc and a downfield pass is not available, that player should look to make a swing pass. A short pass towards the middle of the field, immediately followed by a pass to the far side of the field, will advance the disc a few yards and free up areas for other players to cut to. Once the swing stops at the side of the field and no downfield passes are available, the disc swings back again. This side to side motion keeps the disc moving, keeps the defense on its toes, and can eventually get the disc in the endzone even without long downfield throws.



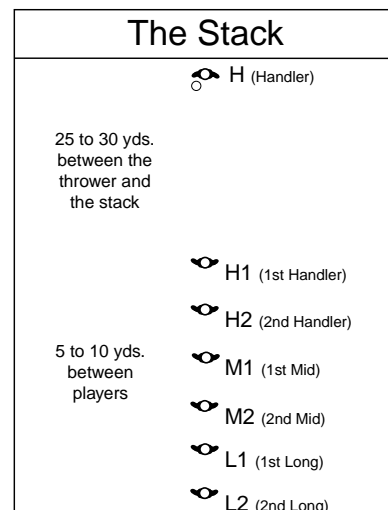
## Strategy on Offense

### **The Stack**

The most common offensive strategy is the “stack,” a simplified version of the “Stanford O” pioneered and used by Stanford University teams with great success. It is just one way of running an offense, but is widely used due to its basic positioning, its emphasis on swinging the disc, and its overall simplicity.

There are three basic positions in a stack offense. Of the seven players on the field, three will be “handlers,” two will be “mids,” and two will be “longs.” Each of these positions has specific duties, but remember that Ultimate requires all players at all positions to be skilled in all aspects of the game.

The ideal movement of the disc in a stack offense is as follows: the player with the disc passes to a handler, the handler passes to a mid, the mid passes to a long, the long then passes back to a handler, and the stack starts again. Each position is responsible for moving the disc, and each player is potentially involved in every play.



**Handlers:** The job of the handlers is to get the disc moving and to keep it moving. They make short, fast cuts, and are responsible for the majority of the passes (particularly swing passes) that will be made as the disc progresses down the field. Handlers need good disc skills, quick legs, and exceptional field awareness. Handlers need to know where the other handlers are at all times, they must spread the width of the field to keep the disc swinging, and they have to know how to “clear” to allow mids and longs to get open for passes.

*What to do when you get the disc:* Look for a downfield pass to a mid or another handler; this is your primary objective. If a downfield throw is not available, look for a swing pass or a “dump” pass (a backwards swing pass).

**Mids:** The job of the mids is to make fast, well-timed cuts to the disc. They are often at the sideline edge of a swing play, and the cuts they make are how a stack offense gains real ground downfield. Mids need good disc skills, speed, and anticipation. The best mid cuts come well before the mid is the target of a pass, while the field is wide open.

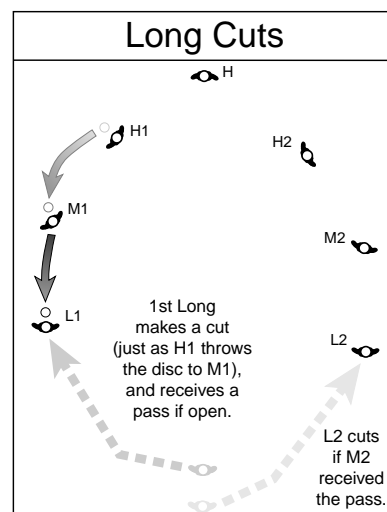
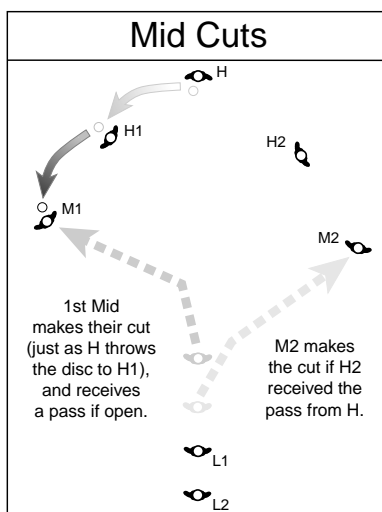
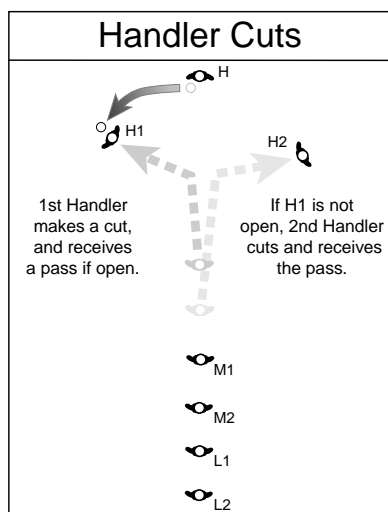
*What to do when you get the disc:* Look for a downfield pass to a long. If no one is open, look for a swing or a dump, but be aware in case a long does get open, particularly on cuts down the line away from you.

**Longs:** The job of the longs is to spread out down the field and prepare for scoring chances. They catch many of a team’s long throws for goals, but they also come up to support shorter downfield throws. Longs need good catching skills, speed, anticipation, and must be able to “read” the flight of the disc on long throws. They must also have the patience to stay downfield when it seems like all the action is far away; it may seem like a long is out of the play when in reality they are the final target. Keep the field spread out and the disc will follow.

*What to do when you get the disc:* Have patience. This is critical. You will most likely be the farthest player down the field, and you must let your team to catch up with you. Wait for a handler or mid and swing the disc to them.

### Cutting From the Stack

The most effective cuts happen when both the thrower and the receiver anticipate the development of a play. If you think a player is going to get the disc, cut towards them even before they catch it – this promotes quick, steady passes, and keeps the defense from establishing a solid marking position on the thrower. And know where your teammates are so that even before you catch the disc you have an idea of where a pass could go to get it to another player.



## **Clogging and Clearing**

One of the worst things that can happen to an offense is “clogging,” when there are too many players in one part of the field. If everyone is close to another player on their team, then they are also close to the defense that is guarding that player. A pass into a crowd of people is risky at best, and will most likely be intercepted or knocked down. The solution to clogging is spreading out, cutting well, and “clearing” well.

### How to Cut and Clear:

- Start well away from the thrower. Twenty-five or thirty yards, if possible. The more room you have, the better your chances of getting away from your defender.
- Look before you cut. Don't cut into an area full of people, and make sure that no one else is cutting into the same part of the field you are cutting into.
- If you make a cut but do not receive a pass, immediately clear the area to open up field space for another player to make a cut. Remember to clear at the same speed that you cut. Don't slow up and hang around near the player with the disc, this gives the person covering you a chance to make a play on the disc even if it is not directed at you.
- If you aren't sure where to go to clear, head for the sideline farthest from where the disc is. Run down that sideline and try to get back into the stack without getting in any of your players' way.

### Turnovers

Because the action doesn't stop when there is a turnover, a change of possession can lead to considerable confusion. If you are playing defense and the disc is turned-over to your team, don't pick up the disc unless you are a handler. No matter how tempting it may be, don't pick it up. Get downfield as fast as you can and take your place in the stack. If you are a handler, don't hurry to the disc unless you see an immediate play – give your offense time to get down the field and set up a clean stack. If you are on offense and your team turns it over, look for the closest player to guard (usually the player that was guarding you) and stay with them. Communicate with your team; yell out who you have, and let them know if anyone remains unguarded.

## **Tips for Good Offense**

### Receivers:

- Make lots of fakes. Fake a cut, then cut the opposite way. Confuse the defense as to your intentions.
- Cut hard to the disc, don't wait for the disc to get to you.
- Try to establish eye contact with the thrower (and beware of calling out to the thrower – this only warns the defense).
- Catch the disc with both hands, watch it all the way in, secure it.
- If you are not cutting, stay out of the way and try to anticipate where a future cut will be needed.
- Clear as hard as you cut.

### Throwers:

- Make the first pass you know you can complete.
- Keep the disc moving, but don't throw the disc away.
- Be patient if no one is open. You have plenty of time to throw.
- Make lots of fakes. This is often the only way to get off a clean throw.



### In General:

- Communicate. Let your team know what is going on.
- Anticipate. Think two steps ahead: “if that player gets the disc, then I should be over there to catch the next pass...”
- Don't be greedy. You are not the only player on the field, so don't make your cuts as if you were. Look out for all your players and where they are cutting to.
- Spread out. The field is a big place. Play the entire field from endzone to endzone and sideline to sideline.
- Finish your cut. If you start to cut to a part of the field, continue all the way there. Always assume that you'll get the disc. If the thrower makes a pass to where your cut will take you, you better be there to get it.
- Keep the disc moving. Quick short throws are far better than long hucks. Even if it seems you are making little or no forward progress, be patient and keep those swings going. Don't think that you have to score in one pass.
- Most importantly: play happy, play hard, and KEEP THE SPIRIT OF THE GAME ALIVE.